



Bank Street

Occasional Paper Series

Occasional
Paper
Series

Volume 2017
Number 37 *Queering Education: Pedagogy,
Curriculum, Policy*

Article 9

May 2017

Gracefully Unexpected, Deeply Present and Positively Disruptive: Love and Queerness in Classroom Community.

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Recommended Citation

hicks, b. l. (2017). Gracefully Unexpected, Deeply Present and Positively Disruptive: Love and Queerness in Classroom Community.. *Occasional Paper Series, 2017* (37). Retrieved from <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/occasional-paper-series/vol2017/iss37/9>

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Gracefully unexpected, deeply present and positively disruptive: love and queerness in classroom community

benjamin lee hicks

During the winter of 2011, I was moving through some of the more overtly physical phases of gender transition. At the time, I was also a grade 6 teacher in a public elementary school. My presence as a visibly transitioning person in that environment was never intended to be a coming out; *it was a choosing in...* and there is a difference. I was “out” because I was visibly different, and I was visible because that difference was not expected. I – as a teacher of children who identifies as a non-binary person, as genderqueer, as trans, *and even as someone who is not willing to be ashamed of all that* – was not expected.

Well-intended and well-documented antidiscrimination policies defended my right to be an educator in theory, but there remained a distinct lack of people and/or practices in place that could help me to feel welcomed in that role – *or even less alone*. The less visible aspects of how we identify ourselves as humans are often labeled “secrets” when they are not expected. When we are forced to keep the unexpected aspects of our identities secret for the comfort of others, we are also encouraged to feel shame if these differences are seen.

I did not choose to “come out” as trans while I was teaching, but I love teaching more than pretty much anything and because of that I chose to stay. I chose to keep teaching, I chose to stay with the same students at the same school, and I chose to invite them into knowing more of who I was as a person and who I was excited about becoming. Being out happened because “out” is a definition that society sometimes attaches to queer bodies that get categorized as visibly different. Someone else’s definition of difference is not the story that I want to write about. My story is about what 24 kids taught me about showing up everyday as your whole and unabashed self... about love.

There are innumerable perspectives from which I could tell this story, ranging from the physically violent to the very subtle gaps between policy and practice that still make it difficult for a transgender person to pee comfortably in most Toronto public schools.¹ These are all valid lenses and it is important

1 Toronto District School Board *Guidelines for the Accommodation of Transgender and Gender Independent/Non-Conforming Students and Staff*: www.tdsb.on.ca/AboutUs/Innovation/GenderBasedViolencePrevention/AccommodationofTransgenderStudentsandStaff.aspx

to keep looking through them from every possible angle; *particularly those that consider how queerness intersects with race, religion, nationality, disability and socioeconomics in ways that allow certain queer bodies to be even less expected and therefore less cared for in mainstream education.* The story I most need to tell is about learning that queering schools deeply and sustainably has a whole lot to do with teaching about something else that is not-so-expected in public education... Love.

SIMPLY SHOWING UP

I want to tell this story in a way that will intentionally connect the words *queer*, *love*, and *elementary school education* in the same Google search because 5 years and several significant Ontario Ministry of Education mandated curriculum reforms later², trans-ness is still not “expected” in elementary school. Despite the lack of welcome by many other adults, a significant truth of my experience has been that my students welcomed me.



I ask myself what it means to be in love with a profession that asks for your entire heart in practice, and then actively dissuades you from feeling too deeply, frequently, or specifically in public. Early in my career, attempting to navigate this contradiction felt extremely difficult. Only gradually did I realize that this is not a sustainable expectation for anyone. In retrospect, it is heart-based decision making that has guided me most effectively through the places where transitions have intersected with teaching.

For example, I needed to learn what sort of access I would allow others to assume when it came to the visibility/vulnerability of my own queerness. I now see that learning to articulate how I feel about my right to privacy co-existing with the hyper-visibility that I can't always control is analogous to creating safe(r), queer(er) classroom spaces with my students. At times, the relational aspects of these explorations included them – *their thoughts, feelings, and own self-selected personal experiences* – as much as they did my own. The most important source for the courage that I have managed to muster as an educator has always come directly from my students, and this was no exception.

² Regarding the recently revised Ontario Health and Sexual Education Curriculum: <https://bioethics.georgetown.edu/2016/02/ontarios-new-sex-ed-curriculum-a-glimmer-of-hope/>

There is much that I could write about the painful and difficult things I have experienced as an out, trans, elementary school teacher but most importantly, I think it is essential to acknowledge that school conditions for transgender students and staff are not significantly safer today. This being said, it is also essential for any of us interested in truly queering classroom spaces to place our hope in those people and ideas that we have not been taught to expect in education. In retrospect, I think that it would have been most helpful to receive this message of hope from sources as unorthodox as myself. Something like a slightly messy, creatively punctuated, and very personal story told through the medium of a scholarly article. Even as I write this, I resist the urge to cite frequently and quote often that has been instilled by my academic training. I am going to keep listening to that resistance because a large part of the urgency that I feel has to do with emotional vulnerability and the magic that can arise from simply showing up.

I know that this essay reads more like a story than a traditional scholarly paper, and this is intentional. I hope that any discomfort that comes from accepting the words and actions of young people as truth will prompt readers to question who it is that academia more frequently ascribes authority to, *and who it does not*. This story of transitioning in a public elementary school would not exist without these kids, and neither would I. They are the most important knowledge producers in this story and, without exaggeration, I would not have made it past the first paragraph without them.

GRATITUDE FOR ROOM .13

This telling begins with an excerpt from an open letter that I wrote about/for my just-graduated grade 6 students in the summer of 2011. The end of our year together marked the beginning of an important new process for me as an educator. In short; having the opportunity to experience an actually-queered and inclusive classroom space during that very vulnerable year gifted my body, mind, and heart a standard of safety that I could then refer back to in every subsequent instance where I was told through words, actions, and/or policy that I as a transgender person did not belong in elementary education. I don't have all the answers as to how we can overhaul our current education system to meet such a standard quickly and/or sustainably... but I do know, *with absolute certainty*, that it is possible. I wrote this letter as a means of internalizing and appreciating all of the remarkably positive gifts that this experience brought me.

August 2011

It has been close to two months now since the final day of school when I walked my beautiful grade sixes out into the schoolyard for the last time. I didn't need to walk them anywhere anymore from a safety standpoint. I could send them down the stairs on their own, amusedly reciting a pledge that they secretly loved because it meant they were big: "I promise not to take out any small people on the way down..." And I knew that they wouldn't. I often chose to walk with them though because in terms of "need", the love, trust, and easy comfort that they gave to me everyday filled up an empty place inside that I had no idea was so deep before they were there. At the end of the school day they wanted to keep chatting, and so did I. At the end of the year, I was in no way ready for that conversation to end.

There are lots of individual activities, decisions, experiences, conflicts, and resolutions I can point to that ensured this group of kids would work themselves so essentially into my own sense of identity. With the last 2 months of space between us, I am beginning to realize that the deepest truth of it all was that we all grew up together.

I met them as "Ms. Hicks" when they were 8- and 9-year-olds in grade 4. I said goodbye to them almost three years later as lee: genderqueer, trans, and five months on testosterone.³ We were all entering into the awkward stages of early pubescence together and somehow this shared experience – however unorthodox – made us all perfectly suited to become family... The kind of family that you choose to claim, and then cherish all the more for the choosing.

"So, you've had girl puberty.... and now you're having man puberty... THAT IS SO AWESOME... You are like the most qualified person ever to teach us about puberty!"

*What better response could a transgender elementary school teacher just coming into be-ing hope for from the 24 people whose opinions and acceptance matter more to them than anyone else? They were genuinely excited. They were unabashedly proud of me. They talked openly of their happiness for me and their belief in me. **They made me so much less afraid.***

Together, we could talk openly about what it takes to grow into the kind of adult you want to be as opposed to the one you sometimes feel like everyone else is telling you that you should be... None of us pretended that we knew how to do this because none of us did – least of all me.

When I talked to my class in February about being trans and, particularly, about the physical transition

³ In 2009, I was pre- physical transition, and my students still called me "Ms." Hicks. Two years later, I asked students to start calling my by first name in order to reduce gender-assumptive labeling. When I was teaching elementary school, my students called me by the "lee" part of my full name, but the name that I use more frequently and currently prefer is "benjamin".

*part of that so that they would know some of what to expect over the remainder of our year together, **they applauded**... Sure, they had a ton of questions, and some worries – mostly about whether or not the inside of me would change as significantly as the outside – but the part that I will remember deep in my bones for always is that when I told them I was happier now, they clapped.*

When I arrived in that grade 4 classroom back in 2008, I was coming right out of a horrendous first year of teaching that was punctuated by daily physical and verbal harassment, vandalism, and panic attacks. I had very little faith remaining in myself, let alone the education system. The year that followed was hard in a different way because I knew that this vacuum of faith was not how I wanted to be as an educator or as a person in the world, but I had no idea how to get out from under the fear that was left when the immediate threat was gone. It took me two years to begin to figure that out and although I still have a hard time describing in words how all of that history has brought me to “now”, re-reading the notes these students wrote to me on the day of their grade 6 graduation has helped. For example;

“This was an amazing year and that was because of the way that you taught us... but somehow the word “taught” isn’t really right.... you trusted us, and because of that we are stronger on the inside.”

I am really glad that they felt so well taken care of in this way, but I am also quite sure that any strength being gifted flowed first from all of them into me.

THANK YOU.

Love, lee.

I share this letter about collective, queer, classroom community building because it is the way that people often react to the words and actions of these kids that has caused me to wonder what makes the difference for me as trans person in classrooms where I have felt safe, seen, and loved, as opposed to the many other places that I don’t. The first thing that people usually say after hearing the story of my 6th grade class is how “exceptional” these kids are... *and they are absolutely amazing...*

But they are not exceptional.

In fact, to attribute that quality to them is to negate the very real potential that all kids and all adults in all schools have to build safe, inclusive classrooms for whomever arrives. This is not a story about exceptional people just as this conversation about queering elementary education should never be

about exceptions to a rule. This is an example of what can happen when members of a classroom community work together to understand how they can love one another well. One percent of the time or less we talked about gender, and the other 99% we talked about love. This did not happen quickly, but it did occur continuously, and that is the context through which I want to share our experience.

I HAD BEEN THAT KID TOO

The more complete history of this grade 6 classroom that became so wonderfully and collectively queered began 2 years prior when I taught many of those same students in a grade 4/5 split class. A “dissonant moment” (Lytle, 2008) from that school year helps to explain how I have come to understand the slow, consistent, and heartfelt process of queering education.

Part way through the fall of 2008, I was moved (based on staff seniority) to a K-6 school in central Toronto. Shortly afterwards, one of my grade 4 students gave me a brave and honest gift that profoundly altered the way I relate to others and to myself as a teacher-learner-*person*. There has been no shortage of dissonant experiences in my teaching career, and each one has differently – but just as fiercely – challenged my sense of a genuine self in relation to the person that I am actually showing up as. In retrospect, this particular incident dared me to integrate more of the gracefully unexpected, deeply present, and positively disruptive aspects of queerness into my concept of sustainable community building.

I had spent much of that previous week introducing my grade 4/5 students to literary devices in storytelling and, on the day that they were to begin their own first draft of a metaphor story, I led them through a creative visualization that engaged many students and yielded some pretty amazing results. I was excited to keep the energy going and, as was our custom, any student who wished to participate was invited to read a portion of their work-in-process aloud to the class. One of these story-sharings took me completely by surprise with both its content and delivery.

The story was called *Ms. Hicks Cloud*, a metaphoric account of a village full of joyous and carefree children who were subsequently overshadowed, terrorized, and then eaten by a massive storm cloud (un-coincidentally named “Ms. Hicks”). I am certain that the other students were surprised by this sharing as well; not just by the 9-year-old author’s courage in telling her truth so eloquently and publicly to a figure of authority, but also because not everyone is equally able to trust their own reading of the discrepancies between what/how people feel and the way that we often ingenuously frame the truth

of our inner worlds. Most kids are better at this than adults but, even by elementary school age, many of us have already been pathologized into believing that such disparities are “*all in our head*”.

I don’t think that I had been acting in an overtly “*child-eating-storm-cloud*” sort of way in the classroom, but I was going through a difficult time. This was a reality that I was capable of keeping in dual-consciousness during the school day, but not one that I could talk about honestly or disconnect from completely in my role as a teacher. The student author was sensitive to such dissonance and, once upon a time, *I had been that kid too*. In my case however, I had also lacked the conditions necessary to support a young person in continued self-belief. I grew up in a situation where genuine feelings were rarely talked about and my experiences of encountering that lack-of-match between the truth of a person’s energy and the way that they claimed to “*be*” were frequently confusing and frightening.

When I first heard that metaphor story read aloud I was filled with deep sadness and regret, but I was also aware that this was probably the most important interaction I had ever had with children. I didn’t know what to do, but I did remember how I had promised myself before I started teaching that I would never lie to kids. I realized in that moment that by denying what my heart knew about the intuitive powers of children, I had also been perpetuating a different sort of un-truth whether I intended to or not. This student heard all of my silence as clearly as the storm cloud in her metaphor story, and it would have been a lie to deny that. I had convinced myself that by not speaking about my stress and unhappiness directly, I was not bringing it into the classroom. By choosing to dissociate in this way, I had also been condoning an institutional ideal that I don’t believe: the notion that difficult emotions do not have a place in curriculum.

I thanked my student for her words immediately... I was honest about the fact that it was going to take me a little while to process the enormity of her gift... and, most importantly, I told her as clearly as I could that what she knew was correct... *that **she** was good and brilliant and brave*.

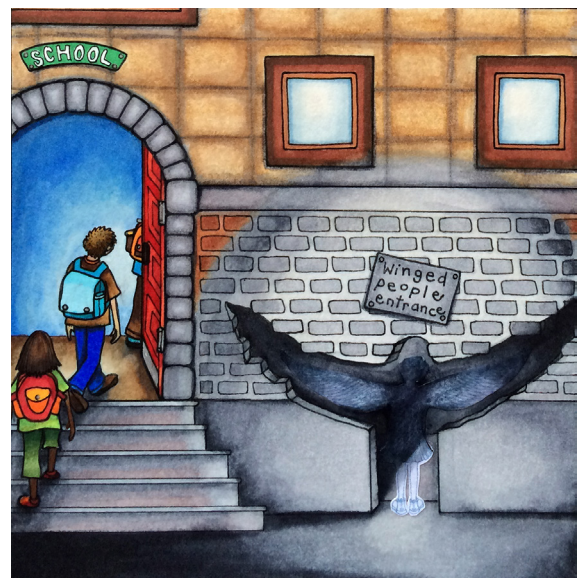
It has taken me much of the last 7 years and a lot of hard work to feel like I am closer to making the same amends with the good and brilliant and brave 9-year-old kid I once was; *a giant part of which has been believing her truths so as to give back bits and pieces of the safety and respect that she has always deserved*.

The kids that I work with have taught me every day about their want, need, and right to be with adults who are doing their own difficult identity work at the same time as they are asking these risks of their students. So much of the way that I now think about teaching, about research, and about BEing in the world has its roots in what this one kid taught me about emotional integrity.

ALL-WAYS IN TRANSITION

I believe that a big part of my job as an educator is to facilitate the co-creation of classroom/school communities that expect *so much more* than binaries and pre-determined labels... That any adult who has the privilege to work with children also has a responsibility to help them learn about a multidimensional universe of intersecting identities **before** all of the false binaries of *boys/girls, gay/straight, good/bad, right/wrong, me/you* become their automatic default for everything from math problems to washroom use. I don't think that it is possible to do this job sustainably or well without making an ongoing commitment to one's own self-care, personal growth," and comfort with change. A main difference between what "anti-transphobia education" and the deep, continuous queering of educational spaces feels like in my experience can be found in how the pedagogy of "teaching about" theories of gender differs from the experience of knowing that "*every living thing, at every living moment is **all**-ways in transition.*"

Oftentimes, when school-based efforts to address transphobia are discussed in an academic context, we end up focusing on reactionary initiatives and responding to surface behaviors. This seems to keep happening even though the ideas that underlie these behaviors are usually entrenched in what that school's culture supports/ignores regarding how one person relates to another. Without a common understanding of how transitions of self and identity are a natural component of every human life, even the words that we use to talk about ending violence can tend towards aggression. For example, I recall a poster for Pink



Shirt Day, 2013⁴ that featured a giant hand attached to the words "STOP IT!" physically lifting a singular, crying "bully" up into the air while a crowd of "allies" looked on⁵ ... Phrases like "*Stomping out Bullying*", "*Combatting Homophobia*," and "*Fighting Discrimination*" are frequently used to represent efforts that must actually have begun with the goal of making school spaces safe(r) for difference to reside. This gap between intention and action afflicts many well-meaning school initiatives and it is often here that efforts to support inclusion end up embracing a violent, divisive rhetoric similar to the initial threats themselves. I wonder if this tendency towards *us vs. them* is a by-product of the false binaries for

4 **Pink Shirt Day:** <http://www.pinkshirtday.ca/>

5 **2013 Pink Shirt Day poster:** <http://childrensdirectory.net/2013/02/are-you-ready-to-stop-bullying/>

“identity” that many of us were taught as children... *And I wonder what might happen if some fundamental shifts were to occur in how new teachers are encouraged to explore their own relationships to identity, transition, and change at the same time that they are learning to build queer spaces with children...*

During this first year outside of a grade school classroom, I have reflected on who I am as a teacher, student, artist, and activist. I have been thinking about what it means to embody any of these roles “well” or with integrity, and where I can most usefully direct my time and energies in relation to all of that as I move forward.

In my scholarly work, I am drawn to methodologies like critical practitioner research and arts based data analysis where abstract spaces can be something to *come home to* as opposed to a threatening otherness that must be fixed/erased/filled-in. It is no longer an absence of contradictions that I am looking for. I, like many people, enrolled in an education program with the belief that “school” was predictably formulaic. It was not until my own changing sense of identity ran headlong into the mirror held up by my students that I realized how much more there is to being an adult who chooses to teach/learn/work with kids than there is to simply being employed as a teacher. Even then... *even in the undeniable realization of this difference...* I was in no way prepared for the scope of unlearning and emotional re-education that it would take for me to keep showing up and *staying* as the classroom teacher that these/all kids deserve.

WHERE DOES THE WORK COME FROM NOW?

When Susan Lytle talks about *legacy* in relation to critical practitioner research and raises the question, “*Where does the work come from?*” (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009), I think about those roots that feel too deep to tunnel for, and of every other thing that our human bodies remember when our brains decide, *out of trauma and/or some more subtle form of social collusion*, to-remember-to-forget. As a researcher who is now in a position that potentially affords the privilege to dig-down-deeper into a system of roots that are not all mine, I feel both the weight and want of a consciousness that will remind me about the exponential loss incurred when we skip over the histories of “what,” “who,” and “how” came before. Who I am includes all of the trans-heroes: quiet, bold and brilliant revolutionaries; unlikely feminists and gentle men; genderqueers; and neurodivergent psychiatric system survivors who challenge me to stay real and present in the world. When I engage in systems of education as when I am doing anything, I want to remember the people who taught me about love.

When I think directly about my own experiences growing up in school and society, I know that every fiber of my queer/trans body remembers the depth of tired that comes from not understanding how to speak. *“I remember the futility of trying to splice together fragments of a language that was too limited to tell the story myself to anyone, including myself. As a child, this took up so much of my own substance that wanting to disappear felt not only natural but also easy, expected, and “right.” It has taken a long time to learn that public education was not constructed to include those of us who exist in the in-between, and even longer to understand that this is not something we need to be ashamed of”* (hicks, 2016).



This is essentially what I mean when I write about the experience – the violence – of not being expected... To arrive at a school—excited and ready to communicate—only to find that words to describe the most precious aspects of yourself do not exist here. This is traumatic... *and this is the memory that stays.*

AGAIN/FOR THE FIRST TIME EVERY DAY

Many of the most important transitions of my life have occurred in relation to school. Making a commitment to remain as self-reflexive and in-the-moment as possible with the good, hard, and challenging aspects of this process has gifted me with a new hope for what having people support you unconditionally through teaching/learning can mean. My students were my first teachers of this possibility because they loved me... I think it is important to acknowledge that there was nothing in the formalities of my initial teacher education program that encouraged me to love them back. I say this because I want to be clear about about “love” in the context of a classroom.

When I speak of “loving community” in classrooms, I am thinking about the explicit teaching of love that bell hooks writes about:

“Imagine how much easier it would be for us to learn how to love if we began with a shared definition. The word “love” is most often defined as a noun, yet all the more astute theorists of love acknowledge that we would all love better if we

used it as a verb... M. Scott Peck (echoing Erich Fromm) defines love as “the will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth”... Had I been given a clear definition of love earlier in my life, it would not have taken me so long to become a more loving person. Had I shared with others a common understanding of what it means to love, it would have been easier to create love” (hooks, 2000).

I write so insistently about love in relation to the queering of elementary education because I think that at this point in history, one of the queerest things a person can be is a teacher who talks about what love can look like in the North American public school curriculum.

When we came together at the beginning of that 2010 – 2011 school year, my grade 6 students and I began a slow, consistent, and unapologetic process of writing down who we wanted be, how we wanted to be treated, and how we could practice extending these wants, needs, and rights to one another. One of the most profound agreements that we made that year was the one that encouraged us to see each other again/for the first time every day... to keep trying to talk about how we love and care for one another with tangible skills and actions as opposed to just some words about a notion we can’t **feel**. (see Appendix)

EVERY TIME THAT WE STAY

I taught for 4 more years in three different schools after I started hormone therapy and before I embarked on a graduate school adventure. My experiences with the staff, administration, and wider school communities varied but the best, the most consistently safe, and the *queerest* part of any of them always came from the time I spent each day getting to know my students and letting them know me.

As a new teacher, I initially struggled with how I might see, hear, and understand each of my students as individuals with so many in each class and so little “unscheduled” time together. It wasn’t until that January afternoon in 2009 when I heard the Ms. Hicks Cloud story read aloud that I started to think about this question differently. There was something in this experience that pushed me to ask myself how I could also let **them see me** more clearly/more of the time... and I’m not going to lie; *it was terrifying*.

I had seen very little evidence in the culture of elementary teaching to suggest I could safely admit the times that my feelings and experiences were less than sunshine and rainbows. It was difficult to remember that this emotional self-censorship is more of a social norm than a logical necessity. With the gift of this 9-year-old’s truth in front of me however, the idea that my own fears could be the main

thing standing in the way of class cohesion became an even scarier prospect than vulnerability. As such, it was later that same week that we started a daily ritual of “check-in” during morning attendance time.

Instead of just saying “here” when I called out their name, each student began to respond with an adjective describing how they were feeling that day. As the months went on, the students took pride and ownership in the development of this practice. The things a classroom teacher might worry about such as air time shared between shy and talkative students, the maintenance of mutual respect, listening skills, confidentiality, and even the sustained interest of *all* students day after day took care of itself. With this group – as with each new class in each year that has followed – a space opened up in reaction to this activity where we could each relax into the experience of having a few minutes of focused care, concern, and attention directed our way each day. It never ceases to amaze me that young people often seem to know quite instinctively what to do in return with that love, trust, and respect once it is offered to them.

At the same time that I began asking my students to start to our school days together in this way, I promised myself that I would honor their courage with as much of the same sort of strength that I could muster. As such, I also checked in with my adjectives of hopeful, excited, sad, frustrated, and/or exhausted every morning... Not necessarily with the details of “why”, but with the promise that even if I was feeling any of the less-than-cheerful emotions that teachers are often trained-out-of admitting, *I would tell them*. By the time that those grade 4 students reached my grade 6 classroom 2 years later, this intentional time that we spent sharing and listening to one another had laid the groundwork for a reality of inclusion that, although not perfect, was *trust-worthy*.

And it was beauty-full.

This is only one example of what a consistently queered classroom space can look like, but I hope that these specifics might also explain what I mean when I speak of how my students have loved me well. When I told them that I was transgender and they clapped, their genuine happiness felt all the more true and amazing because of every other time that we had trusted one another enough to feel anger, grief, and/or despair in one another’s presence... Every time that we had stayed.

CONCLUSION

My gender identity has never been a “secret” needing to come out. Standardized education does not yet know to expect me and is still surprised to find out that I am here, *but that doesn’t mean I am hiding when*

I don't explain. When I am not intentionally “out” as a trans person, my life is characterized as a secret that I should have told... *and when I am*, my identity is still frequently deemed inappropriate to share with children. This is still the daily reality for most trans and genderqueer people navigating a school system whose policy reforms are designed to accommodate us.



I do not want to be accommodated.

Like everyone else, what I do want is to love and be loved and I do not see any reason why all of our school-based endeavors should not acknowledge and encourage the things that we each need to learn and practice so that we can support one another well in this need.

Our lives should not require accommodation because we are *all* in transition.

ALL-ways.

(My students taught me that).

Appendix

2010 – 2011 Grade 6 Class Agreements:

LOVE:

We believe that our classroom is a microcosm of the world and that we have a lot of control over the balance of hate and compassion within our small community.

We will be compassionate and give everyone the chances that they need to make positive change so that they can earn more trust within the group.

We agree that everyone deserves a clean slate every day, and that this is one way that we can increase LOVE.

We consciously choose to increase the amount of love in our class, which will directly reduce the amount of hate. We believe that love is an antidote for hate.

RESPECT:

We will respect the personal space of others, which means keeping both hands and unkind thoughts or words to ourselves.

We agree that labeling a person because of their differences is unfair and we will give everyone the right to declare their own identity.

We will ask questions and try to understand more deeply instead of making assumptions about people or ideas.

We believe that everyone has beauty and talent inside of them and that, instead of judging them on first impressions, we will make the effort to learn about their uniqueness.

INCLUSION:

We recognize that ignoring a person's point of view or talking over them IS exclusion; therefore, we will always listen and respond to a person who is sharing their ideas.

We will work to help everyone feel included by accepting people for who they are and making sure that they are invited to join the group.

We will be brave and offer kindness to others; even if we are feeling shy or scared.

PEACE-FULL RESOLUTION:

We believe that there is more potential for power in peaceful negotiation than there is in bullying because bullying causes harm to both the bully and the bullied.

We believe that **silence = permission and permission = promotion** and therefore, we agree to speak up when we know that someone is being hurt; to ignore the problem is to perpetuate it.

We will think before we act out in anger, and solve our problems with calm and intelligent words. We agree that our goal as a group is to achieve fair and peace-full resolutions to problems.

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